Deployment through the Eyes of Adolescents

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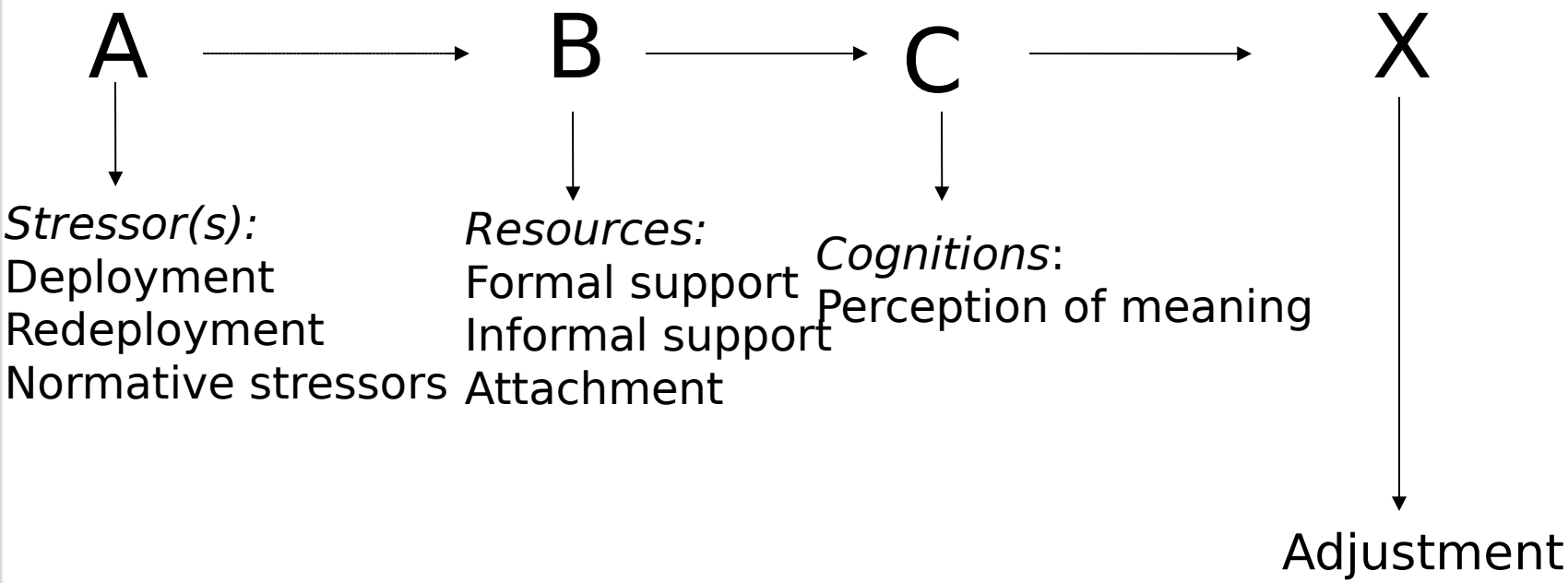
What do we know?

- Our studies
  - 2004 Focus Groups
    - 14 focus groups; 107 youth, all Services (3% Navy; 4% Marines)
    - Accessed via NMFA
  - 2008 focus groups
    - 11 focus groups; 85 youth; all Services (4% Navy; 8% Marines);
    - Accessed via Operation Military Kids Camps

Double ABC-X Model of Adjustment

(McCubbin & Patterson, 1983)



Normative Development

- Brain development—frontal lobe still under construction
- Ability to take others' perspective
- Ability to monitor own reactions/presentation of self

Stressors: Deployment & Redeployment

"When he came home from, like, his training or whatever when he was supposed to leave, but he had been gone for like a month, but it was still like you know were excited to see him or whatever. It almost felt like you didn't, like, connect again, like, he was home like physically, but he wasn't because you didn't want to get like re, like, attached to him again. So, like, there was a lot of stuff like, oh, this happened, you had so much to tell him, but like it was like you didn't want to get so attached again that it was emotional, like, leaving again..."(17-year-old White female, National Guard)

"...I think like he's in the Retired Reserves, but I think he's going to go back. Like they're going to say, 'Oh, yeah, just before you retire, oh yeah, you're going to go back.'" (12-year-old White female, Reserves

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INDICATORS OF ADJUSTMENT

Mental Health

Increased Conflict

Behaviors & Coping Strategies

Comparison of High and Low Adapters

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Changes in Mental Health

- Depression & Anxiety

"I can't go to sleep. Because they are up and doing something and you can't like, you're thinking about what they are doing."

"The worst time is when the phone rings because you don't know who is calling. They could be calling, telling you that he got shot or something."

"I could tell my mom was getting like really depressed and since she wouldn't talk, I wouldn't talk. And so everyone around the house was just kind of depressed for a little while…"

Increased Conflict

- Greater intensity in overall family emotion
  - --*"I was angry at everybody…"*
  - --*"I felt enraged. Just means he got taken away from me—they took my dad away from me."*
  - --*"[It's hard] not having a dad to depend on for like two years, and now my mom is always upset when we talk about him."*
- "Lashing Out" response
  - --*"Sometimes I—like, not because I mean to or anything—but I get snappy, sometimes because the stress just leaps onto other people."*

Relationship Conflict

- Noticed Changes in Relationship with Mom

My mom acts different when my dad's gone. It's like she's not her normal self. She's kind of like stressed out and her 'stressed out' effects me too."

"When my dad was gone—the entire time he was gone—my mom, she just didn't try hard."

- Reintegration of Returning Parent

"Well when my dad left, everything's going one way, and when he comes back he's starting out right where he left off so…there's just a big clash and that starts lots of problems…Like he forgets that he's been gone for like a year... So he thinks we're a lot younger and while he was gone we matured a lot over the year. And he's still trying to treat us the way we were treated a year ago."

Coping Strategies

"I know this is weird to say this, but it was like he was dead." (14-year-old White female, National Guard)

"…I really don't like show my feelings, I just hide it, let other people see, hey, if he's not afraid that his dad is going to get hurt because he knows his dad is strong then why should I be afraid?" (11-year-old African-American male, Marines)

"Well, I try. Every time they do the web cam I try not to be around or nothing because I don't really want to see him like that." (13-year-old African-American female, Army)

Formal and Informal Support Networks

- Informal Supports
  - Sources: parents, grandparents, friends both with and without military ties
  - Helpfulness: Provide a chance to release tension or by diverting their attention from a situation over which they had no control
  - Drawbacks: Not always helpful. Sometimes felt inauthentic or voyeuristic
- Formal Supports
  - Sources: youth centers, church youth groups 4-H, school
  - Helpfulness: mixed reviews; wanted those who really understood what they were going through

Informal Support Quotes

"And I sort of feel like my best friends and their families become part of my family, and we treat each other like extended family."

""Everyday at school someone would always say, 'oh, your dad's not doing anything over there. He's just sitting around killing innocent people," and almost everyday I'd get in a fistfight, and it just kind of hit me hard. . . During the deployment...I always used to be able to walk into the school with a strong head knowing that my dad is doing the right thing, that he is fighting for my freedom and that he will defend me at any cost."

"I won't talk to my family about it because they just make it worse."

Formal Supports Quotes

- *"I really do not like that stuff [formal supports]. I like dealing with it myself. But for other people that do like need the support I think it would be a lot better if it was someone who actually went through it and is like not their age but around there somewhere so they could relate to them more. Because I tried that before, tried to do the one-on-one thing, and it was some old dude that pretended he knew how I felt but I knew he didn't. So it really frustrated me that he thought he could do anything."*

- *"I feel like my teachers are more understanding and you know, more apt to give me an extension on my homework because they know about my family. Because I had this one teacher whose dad was deployed and he died while he was over there. And you know, she just took me under her wing and was like my counselor throughout the rest of the year."*

Findings: High Adaptation vs. Low

- Higher Adapters:
  - Understood that change and adaptation were necessary.
  - Place their situation in context.
  - Were less likely to internalize stress, handled stress more productively.
  - Were involved in less interpersonal conflict with family.

Quotes from High Adapters

- *Because I look at how other people are living, like some people, both of their parents died, and they're homeless. And I look at my Dad, and at least I know he is still alive."*
- *"Because there are some, a whole bunch of bad things but there's more good things than bad things happening to me."*
- *"And some of the good things help out, too, like I have really good neighbors that understand the situation going on. And I'm always welcome at my neighbors."*

Findings: High Adaptation vs. Low

- Lower Adapters:
  - Expressed more emotional responses to deployment.
  - Made greater expressions of violence and aggression.
  - Discussed greater levels of conflict with non-deployed parent, usually Mothers
  - Were less likely to feel their friends understand the situation.

Quotes from Low Adapters

"When my Dad is there we do lots more stuff than when he's gone. It's kind of hard to adjust to things without him when he's gone."

"And my Mom is like always stressed out which, you know, is because she has to deal with all of us and like me, she's kind of mad at, she can't have like time or calm down or anything."

"It's just school and all kinds of people just don't really care, and they treat you different."

Summary: High v. Low Adaptation

Differences between the high and low adapters

seem to be related to “B” and “C” factors—

Resources and Meaning Making.

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Parent-Attachment as a Resource

"I usually feel a lot closer to my mom because I know that if something like happens, like, a snake was in the backyard or something and it's like more than three foot, I'm not going to be able to take it, because it will be able to strike me even from six feet away from it, it'll still be able to strike me. I know my mom will know what to do and how to handle it." (11-year-old African-American male, Marines)

"Like with my mom like I guess she kind of had a mental breakdown completely. So I guess I was more of a mom there, like having dinner and stuff . . . She just didn't do anything . . . I didn't talk to her much. I talked to my older brothers a lot though." (14-year-old White female, National Guard)

"My mom was in school so she really didn't have time for her kids like we really like, I can't speak for like my brothers and sisters, but from what they kind of showed, like, my mom grew distant from them. Like, she'd lock herself in her room at night and like for hours she wouldn't come out and just cry." (16-year-old White female, Marines)

MEANING MAKING

Descriptions of:

Disclosure of Deployment

Changes in Roles and Responsibilities

Disclosure of Deployment

"I found out from our answering machine because a guy from my dad's office had called, and my parents had been acting strange so I just listened to the messages, and I found out and kind of blocked them off for a couple of days." (14-year-old Bi-racial female, Army)

"My dad when he was going to leave for Iraq, he had, he told my mom first and then one night they decided to tell us, so they had a group meeting . . . We went to our family room, and they just talked about it. He knew when he was leaving. He told us when he was leaving... Like a couple of days before he left we threw a party for him for when he was leaving. It was kind of sad, but then ... It was actually kind of cool. He left for the first six months to go train in D.C. and like pretty much all over, and when he was in D.C. and then Florida, we drove down there to see him... One time we just stayed for a month with him while he was training." (12-year-old White female, parents in multiple branches of military)

"Yeah. But he pretty much just told us, and we spent time together, but we kind of kept our distance because we didn't want to like, you know, hold on too much. I mean, like, it was kind of like hope for the best, but expect the worst, you know, but we're a really close family." (16-year-old White female, Marines)

Meaning Associated with Deployment

"When my dad was deployed I felt the same as I always do. Once you…if you're born into the military, you get used to it."

"I just didn't know how long they would be gone and when they would come back, because plans change a lot. And we just didn't know like how long we would have to go without our parent."

"I wouldn't say I felt mad, but it's kind of confusing about why he would want to go and put himself in that position."

Changes in Roles & Responsibilities

- Before & During:
  "…my brother was too young. He was just about…one, around that age, and so my dad really all he said was 'I'm leaving it up to you, you need to take care of them, take care of your mother and your brother.' Which kind of… I know he had that respect, but I didn't know he would ever drop it on me, which kind of gave me that good, but bad feeling like yippee, oh, crap." (15-year-old White male, Army)

- Reintegration
  - *"…and it was a lot harder for us…to get into the routine of having him than it was for him to leave…Because there were responsibilities taken up by each of us and then when dad came home, we didn't have the responsibilities anymore but we were used to them and so that caused a change also. And so it's just like, 'Okay, what do we do now?' We cant' go back to being who we were because we're not that anymore. We have to move forward, but it's also something you have to do as a family."*

Resources

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